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THE INDIAN VILLAGE

(A Ten-Year Plan)

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K. S. VENKATARAMANI

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THE INDIAN VILLAGE:

A Ten-Year Plan

BY

K. S. VENKATARAMANI

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SVETARANYA ASHRAMA
MYLAPORE MADRAS

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To
The Peace and Prosperity
Of One-fifth of the Human Race
Who Live in the Seven Lakhs of
Indian Villages

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FOREWORD

THE cry of "Back to our Villages" has been persistently heard for several years past. Those who left the villages two generations back in search of the new education and the advantages it offered through modernisation in outlook and in social life, now find that times have further changed and produced new men with new needs, ideals, and aspirations, and that therefore the towns to whose formation and growth they have themselves contributed are no longer suited to them. Many wish to go back, as they recall the idyll of the old village still living not only in men's memories, but also in the pictures which men's imaginations have formed of

it from the traces still left all over the land. My gifted and admired friend, Mr. Venkataramani has, with his poet's soul and conjurer's wand, here drawn a cheering and charming portrait of what it was and might be made to be again, and it ought, in my view, to be placed in the hands of every Indian schoolboy.

Many landholders, cultivating peasants, and even workmen still engaged in rural industry of one kind or another stick on to their lands and tenements or workhouses in spite of the extremities to which they have been reduced by failures of various kinds, and chiefly through the non-adjustment of supply and demand. Our *novi homines*, having hitherto prospered and played their parts in the organized life of the new world of towns and cities, cannot return to the villages unless their restoration—now taking place or to be

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begun under the efforts either of enthusiastic individuals or our new boards of local panchayats—attains its full limit of efficiency not only from the undying elements of vitality in the ancient organisms still remaining scattered all over the land, but through the introduction therein of new sources of amusement, entertainment, and enjoyment—for example, the club, the reading-room, the theatre, etc.—to which they have become accustomed in our modern urban civilisation. Let me conclude by expressing the hope that my friend Venkataramani's vision and portraiture of the Indian village will have the widest possible circulation and will help, too, in bringing about such a universal reconstruction of India's rural life and culture as will prove one of the prime factors in our regaining of that creative joy and peace

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which her ancient strength of wisdom had endowed as her lasting possessions during untold ages of plenteous and disciplined freedom.

Kumbakonam,
20th Dec. 1931

K. SUNDARARAMAN

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THE INDIAN VILLAGE

CHAPTER I

I

THE Indian village is ever worth a serious study as an ancient rendering of a fine civic ideal. Now it has a living attraction. For, 'back to the village' is the song of renascent India. It is a preliminary to our achieving anything great. Before India can do her share of work for the commonweal of the world, she must put her own house in order, and cleanse the feeding sources of her own genius.

In the past, it was our village life that kept our culture pure and intact, the flame

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steady amidst dust-laden gusts of wind. Conquest and invasion did not injure us or break the unity of our life. They were assimilated at the expense of a few military adventurers and ambitious political dynasties, rendering the national pulse only the more live and vigorous for such cleansing.

So careful and wise was the distribution of the life centres of our polity. They were never gathered together into an ugly knot. These tiny village republics acted like the cells in the respiratory organ, and cleansed the impurities of an ever-growing people. Coral-like, they stood the tide of time and assured for India cultural unity, continuity, and permanence. The Indian village is steeped in the sweetness and tradition of a continuous life with which India has not blessed many of her institutions.

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II

Why ? Where is the magic in village life ? The answer is, man is both gregarious and solitary : gregarious for gathering experiences, and solitary that he may chew the cud in loneliness and leisure, and assimilate them in a mood of transmuting rapture. Man too much alone destructively feeds upon himself ; too much in the crowd he becomes a mere twig in the sea without drive or initiative. Village life beautifully harmonises the two, and prepares man for a higher plane of action, a simpler and more fruitful existence.

The Indian village, as a serious and successful social experiment in this direction, deserves a critical study. It has a special value both for its own sake as a vital Indian problem, and for the message it seeks to convey to the whole world. Even as mere arithmetic, ninety per cent

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of India, one-fifth of the human race, live in the villages and follow the plough.

It is good that attention is now centred on rural problems. It is timely. Disease reminds us of health. Decay brings ideas of renovation. The Indian village has been slowly crumbling into ruin like the pagoda of its own temple. Economists who specialise in world problems, ask us to suppress a tear at the happening of the inevitable. They talk of merciless world causes and pitiless economic laws. But thank God, a new wind is now blowing all over with rain-clouds on the sea-line.

III

The pure Indian village is somewhat rare now but not yet extinct. Many of its characteristic features remain. Within the last fifty years the mainspring has snapped. But the wheels have not yet stopped

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clicking and the hands still continue to show time in obedience to an impulse not yet exhausted.

The true Indian village or a homogeneous group of villages nestling together within the well-marked boundaries of meandering rivers and ancient roads, is always a self-supporting unit. It is a perfect whole, a complete thing not merely in the excellence of its soil and climate but also in the outlook and temper of its citizens. It has a definite atmosphere. It satisfies the first conditions of decent life. It raises its own corn and oil adequate to nourish its population. It has enough cattle for milk and for agricultural purposes. It has its own artisans to serve the primary needs of civilisation, though not its refinements and luxuries.

Weavers, carpenters, smiths, barbers, washermen, and potters work together for

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the commonweal of the village with a devoted heart, for their interests are well entwined with those of the land-holding classes. For they too hold *maniyam* lands on service tenure from one generation to another, and the *maniyam* is the choicest acre in the village and their pride and pay. The village temple crowns this material framework. It inspires all labour with a common and selfless joy. It promotes and keeps alive the unity and co-operation of the different classes in the village.

The real beauty and strength of the village system lie in the simple harmony between capital and labour. The one is intimate with the other. One works for the other and the need of each, which is limited by a long course of tradition, is the scale of reward. So minimum is the conflict. The village prosperity is firmly

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secured. Indeed, capital and labour are, to the casual eye, almost indistinguishable.

Every artisan and labourer is paid primarily by an allotment of land in the village, adequate to keep a family in comfort as tropical needs go, though not in luxury. Certain fixed recurring duties are the incidents of the tenure. And extra work is remunerated by payment in kind—paddy, ragi, or maize. The efficient monetary system of the civilized modern world plays little part in this primitive but idyllic society.

The carpenter who fashions the plough and the blacksmith who forges the share, have their *maniyam* lands and free residential quarters. So also the barber, the washerman, and the potter. There is hardly a man in the village who does not look up to agriculture as his primary profession. So everything on which the

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prosperity of agriculture depends, is carefully looked after. Work has the joy of recreation and the sweat on the brow is a pearl-like drop. For you do not sweat for another.

The manuring of the fields, the clearing of the silt of the channels, co-operative irrigation and drainage of the fields, tank-digging and temple festivals and sundry repairs are attended to with a fidelity of spirit and devotion of heart that lift common work to the level of a sacred duty. When so many have to be provided with land, none holds so predominant a share as to control or paralyse the small holders. There is practically an even distribution of land in a well-constituted village.

IV

Now we shall consider the internal arrangement for the actual agricultural

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work in the fields and the administration of a village.

Every labourer or tenant, like the artisan, has his own free quarters and his *maniyam* lands, usually half an acre. He is paid also daily wages in kind on active field-days. In addition, he has a share in the gross produce varying from ten to twenty-five per cent. He is entitled to certain perquisites which include a pair of clothes on *Deepavali* or *Pongal* and on certain fixed festive days in the year, about half a dozen. Every birth and death in the house of labour is entitled to a commiseration from capital.

There are also a few petty officers. They too are paid mainly by an allotment of land. The *talayari* has his *maniyam*. He is the village watchman, an important person who combines many offices in himself, chiefly police duties and the sum-

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moning and organising of labour for field work. The *niranikan* has also his *maniyam*. His chief duty is to irrigate the fields impartially and attend to the growing crops, be they of the rich or the poor. In addition, he is entitled to a sheaf of paddy on every threshing day in the harvest season.

Then superimposed on this simple framework is the celebrated Panchayat system which governs the village. It is a body usually of five and the work is honorary. This village Panchayat was the only effective Government which the average citizen of South India had known and cared for till the British power reached its mighty, centralising arms from Delhi so as to control and shape the smallest inland village.

In the Panchayat, it is the president who really counts. He is often a here-

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ditary holder coming from a family reputed for its learning, piety, and character, and owning a decent share of lands in the village. Neither wealth nor mere intellect by itself had ever commanded great respect in India as now. Mere cleverness and adventurous energy were never rewarded with well-minted and shapely coins. Piety, learning, and character were everything.

Theoretically, the chief Panchayatdar has great powers to summon and chastise anyone. But tradition and his own broad humanity and culture fix him within the just orbit of *dharma* and village work. The other Panchayatdars act as silent checks on any likely abuse of power by the chief. The one common ideal is the efficient cultivation of the land and a simple life of peace. If the mind is not very much cultivated in the modern sense

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with a plethora of books and an array of humid lectures, at least land and life are to the utmost. The weeds are pruned with incessant care. A full, humane, and moral life is the reward. Men are indeed golden in the true Indian village like the ripening grains in the fields.

Nature has made everything perishable and the Indian village never attempts to preserve Nature's gifts in the cold storage of coins, copper, or silver. So whenever anyone has surplus grains or vegetables that must surely perish sooner or later, he distributes them gladly to his fellowmen on improvement work or religious vows or general philanthropy. What is raised by co-operative labour is returned to the villagers, if not in the exact ratio of the quality or quantity of work of each benefited, at least fairly and adequately according to the likes and needs of each. So

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no one is actually unemployed or destitute in a true Indian village. The secret of this prosperity lies in the universal devotion to the plough as the primary source of wealth and the trade seclusion which the village enjoys.

V

The above sketch may seem ideal but it is real even now where the essential conditions obtain. Even to-day there are a few *inam* villages on the banks of the Cauvery which have this loveliness and peace because of the shelter they have from the raids of modern competitive life.

This idyllic peace is possible only on these conditions of seclusion and simplicity. An agricultural population which has developed a taste for industrial manufactures which a village can never produce

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without maiming its identity, has rapidly hastened the decay of the Indian village and has almost blotted out within half a century one of the fairest and most ancient of our institutions which survived many changes and onslaughts for over twenty centuries.

In the wake of civilisation new tastes and habits are being acquired which are neither nourishing nor necessary for the higher and truer quests of life. The food-stuffs of a village are exported in order to buy luxuries which have become necessaries by regular use. This severe drain year after year impoverishes the village. Even in an Indian village, there is and will be for a long time to come an unequal distribution of wealth. So what is left is a bare subsistence even for the big land-holder because of his acquired taste for needless urban luxuries. The labouring

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classes suffer acutely, and more and more join their ranks in the general ruin. *Maniyams* have been either annexed by greedy landlords or have become unattractive. For, agriculture has become unprofitable under these conditions. The common co-operative work on which it thrives, such as silt-clearing, manuring of fields and rearing of cattle, are naturally neglected. The joy in work that springs from a sure harvest, is no more.

Nor these only. The worst evil that has now befallen an Indian village is the quantitative and the qualitative depletion of its best men in the wake of these initial difficulties. The best men, its hereditary *Panchayatdars*, are no more in the village. They have fled to towns for a living, as vakils and clerks duly hoping to become judges and magistrates, collectors and council members. Our vision, in the wake

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of Western ideas, nay our very bones have become commercialised. Ambition, unreal and ruinous, is driving us away from real and nourishing work. The eddies of the market place have caught our souls. Its shouts and excitement have denied us the sweet voice of the simple folk and the common joys of humanity.

The remedy is simple on paper but difficult to work out in practice. The habits, ideals, taste, and outlook of the people should change from the exotic to the indigenous, from the luxurious to the simple, from the urban to the rural, from the raw new to the ancient old. Simple life should once again be fixed as the ideal for all time.

The Indian village is a national asset, and it is the first duty of renascent India to revitalise the hundreds of Indian villages by reviving the old agencies which

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rendered the Indian village a little paradise on earth. This sacred duty is clear to one who knows the significance of an Indian village and its importance to the world.

VI

What is the meaning of an Indian village? What is its significance to the world?

The Indian village offers the only solution to the economic ills inherent in every progressive society which remodels itself for a higher stage. It enshrines a great and a human principle. It recognises the fundamental right of man to be paid a salary not in accordance with his skill but in accordance with his needs for honest work done, and paid in the most primary form of wealth, assignment of land. In the eye of the Indian village, wages are equal for all, for stomachs are an equal

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span for all, be he the cleverest artisan, or the most stupid tiller of the soil.

Energy, intellect, piety, and character are best rewarded in India, not in an upward and soaring scale of salaries, but by the real affection and respect of the people. Is this not a lesson to the West and the East? The payment is never sumptuous. For sumptuousness is not at all in the line of our philosophy. We take a pride in limiting our needs. We always honour simplicity, character, and piety. We do not worship the mere intellect, for it is after all only a means to make a full man, even as an engine is to a factory.

The Indian village stands for a great principle. Every form of labour must be paid equally, be the worker the highest official or the porter who carries his luggage. For the true economic needs of men are equal, as hunger is the same the

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world over: two measures of paddy for each per day. This is the soul-stirring cry and the world-message of the Indian village.

The Indian village reflects a great civic ideal. It is the most direct and cheapest form of government. It is India's solution to the craze of over-government, costly, grinding, sterile, pale and mis-shapen that is now sweeping into an ugly and futile knot the best brains of the world. Simplicity alone can save humanity. The Indian village is the very embodiment of simple life.

The Indian village is not a necessary accident in an agricultural country. It is the fruit of a philosophic enquiry into the highest wheelings and the lowest circlings of human nature. Our *Rishis* have built it as a hermitage for collected humanity on the wayside of evolution. It is an ideally

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fit abode for men of learning, piety, and character. It is the working place for the worker and the cloister for the scholar. The one could change easily into the other, like cloud into rain.

The Indian village is the best reconciliation between the perpetual demand for action which matter makes, and freedom from action which the spirit demands. Even as the body is to the soul, the village is to a body of men—a haven of rest to the water-lashed and storm-bitten ship.

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CHAPTER II

THE INDIAN NATIONAL TEMPERAMENT.

The national temper which once shaped and realised at the height of its purity and power this ideal village polity has considerably changed through the centuries in the modes of expression and symbolism though not wholly in substance and spirit. We must slowly blow the dying embers into a living flame. This is essentially the task of renascent India, of an active, far-sighted and selfless statesmanship. The rebirth of the Indian village is largely the rebirth of Indian life and character, a real emergence from a quietistic comprehension of life to a dynamic rendering of it in every aspect of our daily life.

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It is surely not an accident due to a whimsical mood of the gods that we have been a subject nation for over a thousand years. The loss of freedom leads to the loss of courage and manhood. Why did we lose it all, the first condition of life? It is a valuable enquiry. From the battle of Panipet to the battle of Plassey one lesson shines clear in Indian history, revealing a national defect of character—a total inability for team work even in high crisis.

As individuals we are excellent but as a collection a fighting mass of agonised atoms. Like the dainty *sampanki* flower we smile proudly in domestic bunches on the parent creeper, but once knit into a garland we become frail and broken. Individual excellence shines solitarily like a dew-drop on a blade of grass only to evaporate at the first touch of the rising

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sun. But a dew drop, however lovely, can never make up by itself the stream of national life. We bat and bowl brilliantly but the runs are few and the 'ashes' are never ours. Because for team work we show an innate reluctance. Team work means give and take, mutual forbearance, love, impersonal work and self-sacrifice for a final result the immediate glory of which may not be reckoned ours.

The absence of this team spirit has led to a failure of very many valuable, social and civic virtues upon which alone we can build a stable nation, especially in India, a continent of many millions with endless varieties which, well-woven, would make only for the richest decoration of national life. It is sometimes wiser and more useful to reflect on our deficiencies as a nation, than to live in a triumphant but vacuous mood exalting the glories of a

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past that is no more ours. The surest way to reach it again is by knowing the causes for the fall and striving sincerely to efface them from the national temperament.

Either as individuals or as a nation we have undoubtedly some of the higher virtues of evolution. For instance, gentility. But it is a gentility without grit or power, for it is without courage. Courage is the first quality of life and we have lost it, and with it our freedom. Decadent life is usually marked by two attributes : want of courage coupled with a theoretical knowledge of the good and the beneficial which remains unrelated to action, and a state of the mind which sees nothing nourishing or helpful in its own environment but feels blessed only by an alien touch, often the unkindly touch of the ruling hand.

We see more the limitations than the virtues in ourselves and our neighbour. A complete saturation in sympathy is the first condition of creative activity. For jealously smothers love and without love there is no sympathy. Our average citizen is a citizen without civic virtues, painfully toiling for himself forgetful or indifferent to the commonweal but never enriching thereby even himself.

The one thing we consider as the most priceless asset of our national life is plain living and high thinking. Even this has slowly passed away, within the last quarter of a century. A thorough change has come over the average citizen. Everything is viewed at from• the concrete eminence of the bank balance, a thing never done even in America, which has its own refining traditions and stabilising standards as measures of value. No perma-

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nent code of values for human conduct can ever be shaped from the illusory glitter of silver or gold.

Again, power makes us tyrannical and want of it cowardly. This seems to me a primary defect of our national temperament. Beneficient exercise of power without tyranny, unfailing courage against oppression are the real qualities that keep alive honest and progressive citizenship. This single defect has lost us our political freedom, and the misery and reactions consequent upon this loss is now our heritage. Again, we lack a pure and vigorous interest in corporate life. We do not believe in co-operation in public affairs. In the domestic sphere we have greatly self-sacrificed but we do not carry this valuable spirit to the wider sphere of the nation. Without self-sacrifice there can never be self-enrichment.

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We are by nature compassionate but we do not show it in real deeds on the high ways of life in public affairs. Personally we are clean and of sanitary habits but we throw off our sweepings on to our neighbour who does likewise. We never really give a thought to our neighbour or to our environment and the work for the common weal suffers immeasurably. We carefully avoid bringing in our best to the common work. The finest personal qualities suffer a complete and tragic change when they come to be applied for a common cause. The civic sense, the sense of duty to the public and to the nation is yet to be born. The pride of possession is in sharing it with another. Now we do it gladly in the domestic circle in an exemplary way. If only we can extend it with courage and love to national affairs Swaraj will surely be ours before the dawn of another day.

A listless view of life, an inferiority complex which feels helpless in discovering the authentic and the great in its own life, till they are discovered by somebody else, is ruining us. Our great men are often products touched by an alien hand to high positions, and they themselves fail to become the real leaders guiding and shaping the young. For, they in their old age see not the glimmer of light in the shining eyes of the gifted young. So goes to tragic waste first rate talents in this ancient land during their young and precious years when they need to be watered most by kind words and generous deeds. So not only leaves die and wither and are blown all over by random winds but fruits and flowers as well slowly rot to decay in this unhappy land of ours. All for lack of courage, love and selflessness in their application to public life. Courage

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lost, freedom is lost. Freedom lost, life is lost. And this is at the root of our national degeneration. Words, words, words everywhere and deeds nowhere—deeds for the common good. This makes for a body without blood, a life without energy, a life in name held in bondage for an alien's use.

The above national defect has been thoroughly emphasised and deepened by a sun-dried and soul-less system of education, from the elementary to the secondary, from the secondary to the university, and by the frame of a political constitution which commercialises all approaches to life. We may produce giants here and there and perhaps show that we are still alive but the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link. Our average is dreadfully low both in civic and public

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life. The worth of the average is the crucial point in national achievement.

Our citizenship will know no new emergence till the ancient ideals of courage and selflessness, love and sacrifice are not merely remembered and cited as beautiful texts but worked out in daily life. Only leadership, like Mahatmaji's and Vivekananda's, can stir a fallen nation once again and blow in the breath of life. The *advaitic* sense of oneness remains with us in lonely splendour as ancient and wise texts murmured listlessly in morning prayers while it must pervade every movement of our daily life in thought and action. It will then directly lead us, the incoherent mass, to union and oneness on the highest level. Wisdom is of no use, till it is worked out in daily life as part of the living day. The honey drop in the flower nourishes none, not even the flower

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and is of no use till it is gathered into the honeycomb by the industrious bee.

Health and immortality are of the essence of digestion and assimilation. We failed to assimilate the new impacts enriching our own life stream, ten centuries ago. We have begun to date our slavery.

The work that awaits us in the seven lakhs of villages of renascent India is the work that requires every day discipline, energy, perseverance, love, sacrifice, courage and humility. Once there arises the oneness of mind in the national outlook all these high grade qualities will flow down in a flood, like water freed from snowfalls on Himalayan heights. Clear-sighted, idealistic yet dynamic statesmanship is what India requires just now to realize her deep-pulsed longing of centuries. Freedom will no more come to the

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world through the use of bullets or swords or bombs. It will come only from work, sincere and selfless work and work that refuses to slave for another or to. feed a political machine that perverts the national life.

Loose thinking and feeble and confused action are paid for in domestic affairs by financial losses and discord, and in national life by bloodshed and loss of freedom. Let us all, remembering this, sit together and evolve a plan of life on lines of *Dharma* that suits our age and responds as well to the higher call. Let us then remorselessly work out the plan with patience, love, reverence and courage. Work awaits us all. Selfless work is the *Dharma* for all.

Personally I believe in the possibility of a profound synthesis of all the religions and creeds of India without any loss of

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personality, if only for the purpose of working the political machine of the Government of India. Only such a synthesis requires a leadership as monarchical, humanitarian and beneficient as Asoka's, as catholic, loving and unifying as Akbar's, as virile, devoted and selfless as Sivaji's, intoned with the faith of a spiritual ectasy that is so deeply India's own, in a higher destiny and consciousness for man.

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CHAPTER III
SWARAJ CONSTITUTION FOR INDIA

The political machinery we devise for Swaraj India will be the real measure of our own achievement in turning the renascent energy into national reconstruction on all sides, even as the bucket we send down the well fixes the flow of water into the fields. On the framework of the political machine will depend the national temper for constructive work. A highly centralised and secretariat-laden administration will kill the villages. It will urbanise our life from top to toe. A minimum of government shall be the central idea of the frame work. The constitution shall be light and flexible. It shall not sit heavy on the heart of the nation.

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It shall stimulate full-blooded development on all sides, taking the village as the proper foundation of its life.

I. Village Council or Panchayat

Every village or homogeneous group of villages shall have a village council in which shall vest the administration of the village. Every hundred of the adult population of a village as per census, every decade shall be represented by one member in the village council. But in no case shall the village council be less than five in number.

The life of the council shall be for one year. The election shall be by ballot on the basis of universal adult franchise. The village council shall be presided over by a member of the Indian Rural Service, who shall be finally responsible for the welfare of the rural centre under his charge.

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The village council shall be in charge of irrigation sources and channels, tanks temples, fisheries, schools, both vocational and academic, libraries, health, sanitation and all other rural needs and amenities.

The village council shall be assisted by an executive officer preferably of local knowledge and experience who may be called the village *maniam* or munsiff. He shall be assisted by an accountant or *karnam* and a staff composed of a *talayari* or a watchman who does general police duties and a *niranikan* or irrigation overseer. The executive shall carry out the resolutions of the village council.

It shall levy the tax in its own right through its own agencies at rates of assessment which shall not exceed the maximum and minimum rates fixed by the Provincial Council. Small holdings of an acre shall be tax free. Twentyfive per cent of its

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revenue collections, it shall hold for its own rural needs and purposes of village improvement and administration. It shall remit fifty per cent to the Provincial and twentyfive per cent to the National government, if necessary.

The village council shall be controlled in all judicial matters, civil and criminal by a village court presided over by the officer of the Indian Rural Service. The village council shall act as the jury in all civil and criminal matters before the court which shall have jurisdiction in civil suits of the value of not more than two thousand rupees, and in offences involving not more than six months imprisonment. In other cases they shall go to the District Court which shall have unlimited jurisdiction. There shall be only one appeal in all cases, however big or important, from the village

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court to the District Court, and from the District Court to the High Court.

The officer of the Indian Rural Service shall be recruited partly by competitive examination and partly by nomination from a highly educated class. Subsequently he shall be given a special training. The teacher and the doctor shall be ex-officio members of the village council.

My hopes of village reconstruction are fondly centred on the future village school-teacher. He shall be recruited from graduates who have travelled widely and had some special training. The teacher of the village school must be a real teacher with a zeal for public work. He must have the capacity to dominate the village intellectually and spiritually. In co-operation with the rural officer he must give the true lead to the village council and rural life, and create the proper atmosphere for progress

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fertilising the rural area with the ideas and ideals channelled from the main currents of national and international life.

No officer in the village including the rural, officer the teacher and the doctor shall be paid more than thirty rupees a month at the present purchasing power of the rupee.

Every officer who acquires property anywhere and in any form during or after his tenure of office shall do so only on the scrutiny and sanction of the village council in whose jurisdiction he lives.

The qualification for membership in the village council shall be a fair degree of education, and non-ownership of property exceeding three acres. Membership of the council shall carry with it, if necessary, a subsistence allowance not exceeding ten rupees a month. The village council shall be the statutory advisory body to

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the rural officer. Whenever he acts contrary to the decision of the village council he shall have to report to the Collector of the District who will have the final say in the matter.

2. District Administration

The next step from the village shall be the District. There shall be no intermediate centralisation of administrative authority at *firca* or taluq headquarters. The administration of the District shall vest in one chief executive officer like the present collector. He shall have control over all the heads of the various departments, except the judicial, such as the police, irrigation, forest, education and medicine.

There shall be a District court with unlimited jurisdiction in all matters. It shall be presided over by a judge assisted by a

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jury in all cases, of whom two shall be from the village from which the suit arises.

The District officers shall belong to the the Provincial Service recruited thereto by a Public Service Commission on an all-India basis by a competitive examination which shall be open to all the races of the world.

No District officer shall be paid a salary of more than three hundred rupees a month. And the same rule as to the acquisition of property shall also apply to them.

3. Provincial Government

The Provinces shall be on the linguistic and cultural basis. When there is conflict as to the area of affiliation it shall be determined by a referendum to the people in the area of conflict.

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For every lakh of the population, there shall be one member in the Provincial Councils. Where the population of any Province is less than twelve millions, the council shall not be less than 120 members.

The election to the councils shall be on universal adult franchise.

The Executive

The Province shall be administered by an executive of not more than ten ministers with the Governor at the head. The council shall elect the chief minister. The chief minister shall appoint the other ministers. They shall be responsible to the council which may remove them at pleasure.

The Governor shall be nominated by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister of the Com-

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monwealth of India after consultation with his cabinet.

The Governor shall be paid not more than Rs. 1,000 a month and the ministers not more than Rs. 750 a month.

The organisation, direction and control of the District heads shall vest in the Provincial Executive of ministers.

The life of the Provincial council shall be for three years.

There shall be a High Court which shall consist of not more than ten judges. The salary of a judge shall not be more than Rs. 1000 a month. The High Court shall hear appeals from the District courts of the value of not less than ten thousand rupees or on important questions of law or of public importance.

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4. The Government of India

For every half-a-million of the population, there shall be one member in the Federal Assembly of India. 700 members will be the strength of our first Assembly.

The village council shall be the electoral body. The election need not be on the colossal scale which universal adult suffrage means. There shall be no communal electorates either in the Federal or Provincial Government. The life of the Assembly shall be three years.

The Viceroy shall be appointed by His Majesty the King of England for a period of five years.

The Prime Minister shall be elected by the members of the Assembly. The Prime Minister shall nominate his colleagues. The ministers shall not be more than 12 in number and may be removed at the pleasure of the Assembly.

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The Governor General shall be paid not more than Rs. 1,200 a month and the ministers not more than Rs. 1,000 a month.

In my scheme the salaries are of the very essence and so must be embodied in the Act. With huge salaries running into trooping figures that astonish the lay man who honestly thinks that a day's work is worth only a day's feed, the village can never be prosperous. For huge salaries mean heavy taxation and urbanisation of our lives.

There shall be a Supreme Court which shall decide all inter-district, inter-provincial and inter-state disputes that may be referred to it. It shall also hear appeals from the High Courts on pure questions of law of general constitutional interest or public importance.

There shall be no second chamber or Senate either in the Provinces or in the

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Federal Government. There is no need in India, where colossal conservative forces in politics and religion reign supreme, for a revising second chamber to check hasty legislation. India can never move too quickly. Its immense population and splendid variety are by themselves the greatest checks on hasty legislation. A second chamber in India will ruin tragically the speeding glory, the quickening joy and the fine impulses of the renaissance. A revising chamber will become in India only a rendezvous of all reactionary and selfish elements. Our greatest need is to move quickly, and build our national life before the creative renascent urge is over. A second chamber even with limited powers will retard Indian Progress by three centuries.

On the other hand, instead of a revising chamber, there is considerable utility in

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devising a preparatory house, both for the Provinces and for the Central Government. Our problems are so many, our political life is yet so young, our interests are so varied and conflicting, that a preliminary house for real debate and discussion, of sincere enquiry into high, national policies will prove a great source of constructive strength to the Federal and Provincial Governments. It will clarify the issues, and serve as a guiding light to the real legislators. If it functions well, its moral force would be tremendous. It would be the finest nursery for statesmen and real humanitarian workers.

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CHAPTER IV

A TEN-YEAR PLAN.

Thanks to Mahatmaji's dynamic personality, rural reconstruction, my dream of twenty years, has now become a live issue. The Government of India's annual crore is the best testimony to it. Rural reconstruction is the first definite step in a big constructive movement for which India has been restless these years. It will have a profound effect on our national life and character. Only active and detailed work on a well prepared plan will yield results adequate to the industry. Otherwise it would go to waste like unbounded waters in the monsoon hour. We need a concrete plan of work for ten years. It is the one work on which an autonomous Province should immediately concentrate.

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General

The first step is to formulate a concrete plan of work which will suffice for ten years. An all India Royal Commission on Rural Reconstruction should be immediately appointed to make a complete survey of rural conditions and needs from Rameshwar to Rishikesh. On the report of that Commission which lays down the general principles and the plan of work in broad lines every Province should appoint a provincial Commission to work out the details as suited to the conditions in the province. And every district should divide itself into temporary sub-divisions over which a local commission will sit and survey the practical needs of every village and draw up a report for guidance and action for each village. Legislation, All-India, provincial or village, as recommend-

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ed by these Commissions should be immediately made. This Village Panchayat Act must become the pivot of Swaraj India.

Rural Services

1. The first thing to be done is the creation of efficient rural services to supply the several needs of a village. The formation of an Indian Rural Service in every province under the charge of a Minister, thrown open preferably to graduates, is the first step. Every member of the service, on recruitment shall undergo a special training for one year and shall be posted to a village or a homogeneous group of villages. He shall be the President of the village Panchayat which shall be elected once every year on the basis of adult franchise. He shall have full and final powers to carry out a programme of

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work for his village as laid down in concrete form by the commission of enquiry and settlement. Every sub-division of a district should appoint a local commission which shall make a thorough survey of the local needs of every village within its jurisdiction and draw up a practical report chalking out the lines of work. The local commission shall consist of preferably twenty-five per cent non-local men. The Indian Rural Service officer shall not be paid more than Rs. 30 a month or allowed to function in a village continuously for more than five years.

2. The formation of a new Educational Rural Service: Every member shall be preferably a graduate who shall be given a preliminary training for six months. He shall be an ex-officio member of the Village Panchayat and shall not be paid more than Rs. 30 a month. The colossal

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illiteracy of India can be liquidated on a ten year plan, only if both the popular and official mind be not afflicted by the pompous but sterile idea of erecting a public school in brick and mortar in every village, which encourages only the manufacturer of bricks and not men.

3. The system of subsidy or grant from central or provincial revenues to rural needs is wholly wrong and ineffective in principle and it vitiates and wastes the gift. The village needs must be financed by the village itself. A percentage of the revenue locally raised preferably twenty-five per cent for the first ten years, must be set apart for the needs of the village itself and laid at the disposal of the Panchayat. The only other mode of financing rural needs is the levy of a rural reconstruction cess which is both unjust and unpopular. Without some effective

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and clear cut financial provision for each village Indian rural reconstruction is simply impossible. Rural reconstruction can never be a success unless it is accepted as the first duty of the Government. This colossal work can never be successfully carried through by popular effort or agitation unless popular organisation reaches the level of almost a parallel government.

Rural Needs

The following are among some of the most crying needs of an Indian Village :—

1. A co-operative store and a marketing organisation and a bank. The store shall specialise in agricultural implements, seeds and manure and sell them as cheap as possible.

2. Good grazing ground for cattle in every village. Co-operative dairy farming

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in each village should relieve every home of so much chronic drudgery and repetitive waste of work, with cattle.

3. A sanitary water supply for drinking purposes especially where the main source is not the well but the village tank.

4. A severe penal law for fouling offences both on land and water.

5. A rural dispensary with a doctor and a midwife, with plenty of propaganda for a well regulated and scientific diet and life.

6. Facilities for carrying out in the fields the latest developments in agriculture.

7. Redistribution of fragmentary holdings of each *pattadar* into one block and suitable laws to stop future fragmentation below a certain acreage, say three acre holdings.

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8. Proper irrigation and drainage facilities for each block of land, the absence of which reduces now the yield by one half.

9. Facilities for the redemption of the existing colossal agricultural indebtedness and some law drastically limiting the rate of interest.

10. A garden school with a little theatre and a reading room and a library, preferably as an annexe to the village temple, and a radio set, wherever possible. And an industrial section which would foster the local industries and supply the local needs, now catered for by the village artisans.

11. A band of choice roving lecturers who will give the rural areas the contacts with higher modern thought and science.

12. Encouragement to building houses on garden sites with open space all around.

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13. An intelligent re-survey and re-colonisation, if necessary, of our scattered straggling seven lakhs of villages into more beautiful, healthy, sanitary and compact areas fixing the upper and lower limits of the population of a village and encouraging free emigration to fresh areas declared suitable for residence. Positively discourage the current tendency to build straggling huts along the high roads. It cuts deep into the conception of corporate village life.

14. Large scale production of electric power and cheap supply of the same to rural areas. Steam has vulgarised and roughened modern life. Electric power is sure to beautify it—ruralise urban areas and urbanise rural areas in the best sense.

15. Above all, a profound modification of the system of land tenure, which should be carried out after careful thought and

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enquiry by a commission composed of thinkers from the Sanyasin order of men. Some comprehensive peaceful plan suited to the renascent consciousness of the people must be evolved. Meanwhile encourage by suitable laws tax-free three acre holdings in perpetuity and discourage by progressive taxation large concentration of acres in one hand.

Revival of Village Life

I know the younger generation are intensely longing to do some concrete work, however humble, and shape to constructive ends the vivid stir and the patriotic glow of the renaissance. There are hundreds of young men pining to be 'touched' and waiting to be harnessed to the great work of the Mother. Both among our rulers, British or Indian, and the ruled only one quality is required to achieve the great

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task of renovating the life of the seven lakhs of Indian village: a purposeful idealism that seeks its fulfilment in patient constructive work, like the urge in the bee that vexes the flower till it ripens into the fruit.

His Excellency Lord Linlithgow has now a splendid chance to make his quinquenium an epoch in our lives and to lay the true foundations of peace and prosperity of a great nation which has been aching for over half a century with an efficient but sterile rule that never touched the masses except by the whip-end of the tax-gatherer.

Renascent India will be content with nothing less than a complete emancipation and recovery of her untold millions now in bondage and suffering. War or peace trembles in the air waiting for the new

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May the gods who watch over world's peace and prosperity give His Excellency Lord Linlithgow the vision and the statesmanship to say a bold word and do a generous deed before it is too late.

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2. Mr. Venkataramani is known to a small but discriminating public as the author of some attractive sketches of Indian village life.—G. T. GARRATT in *The Nation.*

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